Welcome to My Brain

Game Instructions

Neurodiversity
in Education
Project

Who can play

The *Welcome to My Brain* game is for everyone, from age 5 onwards!

It can be used in schools, workplaces, families and by counsellors, coaches and other professionals to help people of any age and stage reflect on and share with others how their unique brains work and what it feels like to live with them - when they are "in the zone" or when they are feeling under strain.

Our aim is that by understanding, appreciating and celebrating our differences, we can all ensure that we create neuroinclusive environments - at school, work, and home - where everyone can thrive.

Depending on your context, it can be a great idea to have a facilitator like a teacher or other adult who can support players to experience the game positively and constructively. The facilitator can play as well or just focus on supporting the group. Some ideas for facilitators can be found in this guide.

How to set up

*Welcome To My Brain* is best played with 2-6 people. The game can take as long - or as short - a time as you like. Remember that the purpose of the game is to build understanding and connection. There are no right or wrong answers and no brain is better or worse than others!

You will need a table or a big flat space so everyone can see and touch the cards in the middle.
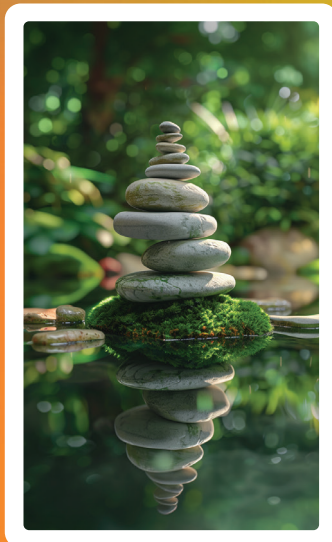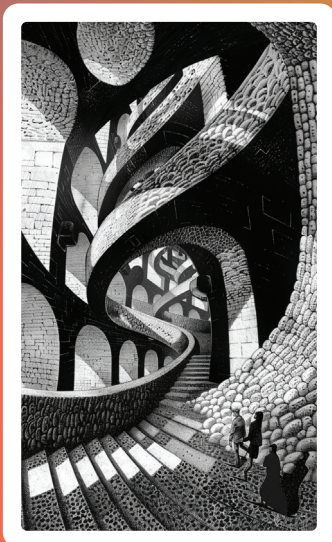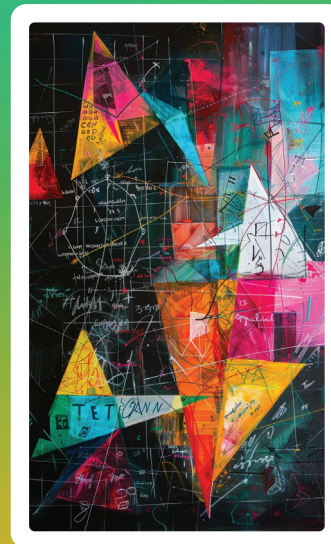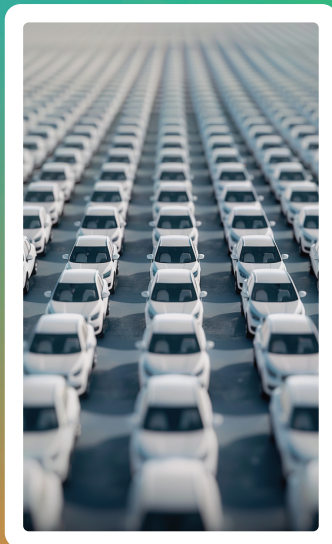
How to play

1. There are three types of cards in the pack:
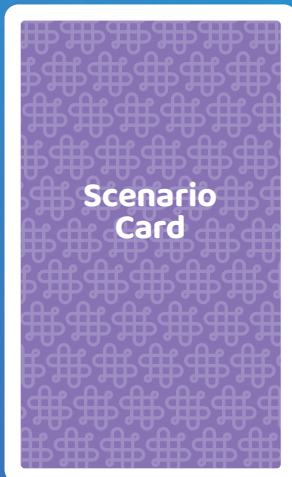
Scenario Card

Scenario Cards

There are two scenarios you can explore - In The Zone and Under Strain
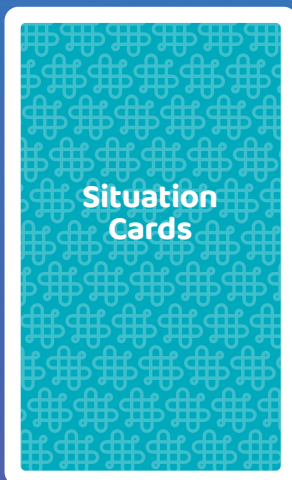
Situation Cards

Situation Cards

Explore the conditions that impact whether your brain is feeling happy or stressed

Image Cards

Image Cards

38 images and 5 blank cards (for you to add images as you choose) to help you share how your brain feels in these different scenarios

2. To start, lay out the **Situation Cards** in a grid so everyone can see them. Turn up the first **Scenario Card** *In the Zone* and place it above the Situation Cards.

3. Put the **Image Cards** face-up in a pile in the middle of the space. Allow some time for everyone to have a good look at them, picking them up to see them more closely as they wish.

4. Begin the game by asking all players to reflect on:
   - Which 1-3 Situation Cards most impact whether your brain feels in the zone or under strain? What specific features of each situation are the ones that really impact on you (note: the table in the facilitators section of this booklet gives you some examples)?
   - Which 1-3 **Image Cards** best **represent** how your brain feels to you in that scenario?

5. Each player then takes a turn to select and lay out separately their 1-3 **Situation Cards** and 1-3 **Image Cards** for the scenario and explain why they have chosen them. After the player's turn, they place the cards back so other players can use them.

6. Once everyone has had a turn, place the next **Scenario Card**, *Under Strain*, on top of the *In the Zone* card. Repeat the process of each player selecting and discussing their Situation and Image Cards.

7. As a final reflection step, take time to go around the group and answer three questions:
   - What was your biggest insight about your own brain?
   - What was your biggest insight about other people's brains?
   - What would help more people's brains be able to work their best at your school, workplace, or at home?

Ideas for facililators

Ensuring that everyone has a positive and constructive experience playing *Welcome to My Brain* means being conscious of how different people's brains work!

Our neurodiversity - and our life experiences - impacts how confident we are in sharing personal details and experiences with others, how easy we find it to express our ideas, how ideas impact us emotionally, how long we are able to stay engaged, and the time we need to understand and process what is being asked and what others are sharing.

As a facilitator, you can create a warmly inclusive space where all these differences are expected, acknowledged and most of all, enjoyed. Be flexible, be curious, keep it positive, and gently call out comments or behavior that are not constructive.

You can also help players explore and share the ideas, including by helping them understand what is being asked and asking questions that help them expand on and communicate their ideas.

Exploring the Scenario Cards

At the beginning, you might talk about the different Scenario Cards - *In the Zone* and *Under Strain*. What does in the zone mean? What does under strain mean? How does it feel in our brains and bodies when we are in the zone or under strain? How does that impact our ability to learn and work - to listen, think, process, organise ourselves, communicate and interact with others?

Scenario Card

In the Zone

What does my brain feel like when it's happy/ working well?

Under Strain

What does my brain feel like when it is not happy/ not working well?

Exploring the Situation Cards

You may also want to take some time up front to talk about the Situation Cards. Discuss with your group what these could mean in situations and contexts that they are familiar with. The table on the next page gives you some words and examples you could use as a start.

My physical environment	Buzzy, noisy, quiet, peaceful, open, big, small, cosy, hidden away, in the action, home, away from home, lots of distractions, no distractions, outside, inside, online, face-to-face, space to move, different spaces for different things ...
The type of work or learning I'm doing	With my hands, physical, mental, emotional, caring, teaching, analysing, organising, administering, helping, talking, writing, making, creating, growing ...
The people around me or who I have to work or learn with	Working in a team or group, working with a buddy, working with people like me or different from me, working by myself, working near other people, working with members of the public, working with the same people every day, working with different people all the time, working with people with clearly-defined roles, working flexibly with people
The culture or atmosphere I am working in	Inclusive, nurturing, busy, stressed, tense, constantly changing, high or low pressure, stable, calm, competitive, innovative, high expectations, rigid, hierarchical, equal

The tools I am using	Digital or physical tools for writing, creating, designing, making, and anything else, physical machines, my body, my voice, animals ...
The amount of freedom I have in my work	Lots of rules, clear tasks, clear accountabilities, detailed plans or guides, a script or plan, broad parameters, big picture objectives, regular reporting, left to get on with it ...
The type of support I have	Help is at my fingertips, I have someone working alongside me, I have a buddy or a mentor available if I need it, I have support but it's not working or not useful or not quite right, I have no support, support is discouraged ...
The amount of control/ responsibility I have	Full responsibility, I am in control of myself, I am in control of others, I just do my part, someone tells me what to do, someone checks on me ...
The pace of work	Fast, demanding, never stops, always increasing, steady, regular, slow, variable - pressure and then down time ...
Extent of challenge and change	Hard, easy, pushes me beyond my comfort zone, things I know how to do, always learning new things, stability, security, predictability, constant improvement ...

Exploring the Image Cards

Explain to your group that the **Image Cards** are for them to interpret in whatever way they like. Different people may well see the same image in a completely different way! The purpose of the **Image Cards** is only to provide a starting point or a tool to help a player communicate their own experience. Because of this, gently discourage conversations about the "right" way to interpret an image.

If you find that your group feels that some images they'd like to use are missing, encourage them to find their own! You can print these images out and glue them to the blank cards provided or use the template on the website (www.neurodiversity.org.nz/welcometomybrain) to print more cards.

Reflection and response

When you are reflecting with your group, celebrate the diversity of your brains and how lucky you have been to get to see inside other people's brains!

How does knowing about the big differences between brains affect how your group will work with other people in the future?

You could also guide the group in recognising the value for groups of having people with different brains. What advantages can your group see coming from this in terms of a project they are working on, or in daily life at school, work or home?

In thinking about the final question - what would help more people's brains be able to work their best at your school or workplace? - you may want to start by emphasising that we can't always be in "perfect" situations where we know our brain works at its best. Everyday life and the different needs of others will always require compromise and some flexibility. But we can:

- Consciously think about how we set up learning and working to cater for brain differences, and how we involve everyone in that as part of an iterative, ongoing process.

- Share and learn techniques to help us in the inevitable situations where our brains are under strain (like using calming techniques, asking for help, building comfort over time with a growth mindset).

- Support people to find areas of learning and work where they can, most of the time, be in situations where they are in the zone. That gets easier in secondary and tertiary learning and then in the workplace where people are able to choose, focus and specialise - to "find their own way".

More ideas for using *Welcome To My Brain* at your place

Check out our website (www.neurodiversity.org.nz/welcometomybrain) for ideas on how to use *Welcome to My Brain* and our extra resources as part of a wider learning programme at your school, tertiary, workplace or within your whānau. We have lesson plans for all age groups, activity ideas, campaign ideas and more!

About our Image Cards

The art on our Image Cards was created for us by Andrea Lee using a generative AI programme through a considered process of development, user testing and iteration.

Like many of you, we are concerned about the way AI capability is currently being developed with insufficient regard for the intellectual property rights of content creators. Our approach is however not to reject AI as a tool but to explore how we can make use of it and respect and value the human contribution by working with it thoughtfully and in ways that benefit the community.